



March 16th, 2022

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Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
888 First Street N.E. Room 1A
Washington, D.C. 20428

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SECRETARY OF THE
COMMISSION

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FEDERAL ENERGY
REGULATORY COMMISSION

Re: Project 2105, Dixie fire/Lake Almanor ecosystem

Dear Commissioners,

I am sure you have read numerous letters from concerned citizens, public officials, and business owners, in the Lake Almanor area of California, regarding the proposed cold water releases from Lake Almanor. As a homeowner and someone who has been coming to the lake since 1975, I share their concerns. However, I am writing to express urgent concern over the effects of the most recent pending disaster to the ecosystem as a direct result of the Dixie fire last summer.

This was one of the largest wildfires in California history and burned with a ferocity and speed never before seen by the firefighters who witnesses it. Lake Almanor sits at the geographic epicenter of this historic conflagration. The fire started on July 13th 2021, 30 miles west of the lake in the Feather River Canyon, and was pushed up the canyon toward the lake by prevailing westerly winds, until it surrounded the lake and several communities. This fire continued uncontrolled for over 60 days burning over 980,000 acres until was extinguished by the first autumn rains and snows.

Lake Almanor sits in a basin at 4,500 feet elevation and is surrounded by mountains and peaks ranging from 5,700-8,000 feet. In other words, Lake Almanor is in a bowl. For weeks and weeks, smoke, ash, embers, and fire debris filled this bowl and settled onto the lake. The smoke was so thick in the basin that our air quality index averaged over 300 for many weeks and peaked at over 800 for about a week, rendering the area uninhabitable. Like most residents, I had to evacuate for several weeks, most of that time due to unsafe air quality. Thick layers of ash, burned leaves, and fire debris, built up on the water, creating a layer of incinerated biomass across the lake, eventually being absorbed into the water. As the smoke gradually cleared, I could see massive islands of ash and incinerated flotsam drifting across the lake. During all of this time, airplanes were dropping millions of gallons of retardant on the surrounding mountain sides.

I have learned that the fire debris deposited an incalculable amount of nitrogen into the lake. Fire retardant, which is a mix of fertilizer and water, will do the same this spring when the snow melt washes it into the lake. I bring this to your attention because of the new development I mentioned, that must be considered in the upcoming project 2105 decision. This fall, even as the water temperature was falling, large blooms of toxic blue-green algae began to form on the water, covering very large areas of the lake. This is an unprecedented event here, and is a direct result of the historic levels of nitrogen being ingested by the lake.

We are all fearful that an environment that supports massive toxic algae blooms will be harmful and disruptive to our healthy fish habitat. The majority of the fish population in Lake Almanor is made up of trout, both Rainbow and German Brown. These fish require cold water to survive. In the summer, when the surface temperature of the water approaches seventy degrees, these fish will only be found at the bottom of the deepest portions of the lake, the same areas where the proposed cold water pumping would occur. The act of raising the water temperature of the lake by diverting the coldest water downstream would not only directly harm the existing trout population but certainly help to exacerbate the toxic algae problem, thereby jeopardizing future wildlife populations, including the Bald Eagle, the Western Osprey, and otters, all of which feed on the trout.

The Feather River Watershed has just suffered a devastating natural disaster that will have a profound negative impact for decades to come. Please do not support a decision that will magnify the damage to our ecosystem. Please uphold the original settlement agreement. This lake, this fish habitat, and this community, cannot afford to relinquish its coldest water.

Sincerely,

Tom Changnon

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